

Human Rights Council 26th session

JOINT NGO END OF SESSION STATEMENT

International Service for Human Rights on behalf of 18 organisations (see below)

Thank you Mr President,

At the outset, we are very mindful of human rights defender colleagues in many parts of the world who are facing threats to their safety, and restrictions to their work through the misuse of legislation to silence dissent. In particular, we recall seven women human rights defenders recently arrested in Egypt for exercising their right to peaceful protest, and we call for their immediate and unconditional release, as well as that of the three Al-Jazeera journalists. We are also concerned about yesterday's arrest of Samuel Mohochi in Kenya, and the closing of Salmmah Women's Resource Centre in Sudan this week.

Reflecting on the Council session just passed, we wish to highlight the following developments.

1. We are concerned about increasing signs of deliberately divisive resolutions and amendments. The task of the Human Rights Council is to constructively work towards the promotion and protection of all human rights for all. The tabling of resolutions and amendments that were not the subject of transparent negotiations previously, or are plainly incompatible with international human rights law continues undermines this task. We welcome that despite such attempts, this Council again affirmed by consensus that the same human rights that apply offline, also apply online.
2. The Council's work is also hampered through procedural motions to stifle debate. The procedural motion blocking the amendment of the family resolution and preventing the Council from voting on the inclusion of consensus language explicitly recognising the existence of diverse forms of families, is a case in point. States who prevent such discussion abdicate their responsibility as members to engage in dialogue on the universal promotion and protection of human rights. We are deeply disappointed that the Council has adopted a resolution, which deliberately omits agreed language on diversity and has the potential to undermine the rights of women, children, the elderly and others.
3. On the issue of business and human rights, while broadly welcoming the adoption of both resolutions, we regret that the sponsors of each were not able to negotiate a single consensus-based text. It is imperative that all stakeholders now work together in a positive spirit to ensure both the effective implementation of the UN Guiding Principles and the development of a treaty on business and human rights that strengthens corporate accountability for human rights violations and access to justice for victims as all States promised. We are disappointed at the lack of reflection in either text of the risks, threats, attacks and reprisals faced by human rights defenders and States' obligations to protect them, and remind States of their obligation to do so regardless of the political climate in the Council. The artificial distinction between transnational corporations and other business enterprises as it relates to their obligation to respect human rights and consult all of the relevant stakeholders,

including defenders, is deeply regrettable, and our organisations and many others are disappointed at attempted limitation of the scope of the Inter-Governmental Working Group's work.

4. The release of Belarusian defender Ales Byalyatski just 6 days before the vote on the resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus shows the relevance of international pressure on governments that restrict freedoms and refuse to engage with international mechanisms. The Council remains a relevant forum to address such situations. We regret however that the Council has again failed to act on country situations where there are worsening restrictions on civil society space, freedom of expression, association and assembly, including Egypt and Bahrain.
5. We thank you, Mr President, for speaking out at the beginning of the session to remind States of their obligation to protect civil society and human rights defenders from intimidation or reprisals. Sadly, this has not deterred several States from intensifying pressure on NGOs and human rights defenders in and around the Council, and at home. With this in mind, States must support stronger action to combat reprisals by endorsing Council Resolution 24/24 at this session of the GA. We ask you, Mr President to follow-up specifically to any allegations of intimidation or reprisals that are brought to your attention, and ensure that relevant governments are held to account in a timely and effective fashion.
6. Finally, we wish to again thank outgoing High Commissioner Navi Pillay for her work. Throughout your term you have sounded the alarm bell on violations, provided protection to victims, and pursued accountability for perpetrators. We look forward to working with incoming High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein to support human rights defenders and promote and protect all human rights for all.

Thank you.

Joined by:

1. *Action Canada for Population and Development*
2. *Akahatá Equipo de Trabajo en Sexualidades y Generos (Latin America)*
3. *ARC International*
4. *ARTICLE 19*
5. *Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)*
6. *Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)*
7. *Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network*
8. *CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation*
9. *Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF)*
10. *ILGA - International Lesbian and Gay Association*
11. *International Commission of Jurists*
12. *International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)*
13. *International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)*
14. *Legal Resources Centre (South Africa)*
15. *Proyecto de Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales, A.C. (ProDESC)*
16. *Reporters Without Borders*
17. *The Federation for Women and Family Planning (Poland)*
18. *World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)*